

MINUTES
SNOWMOBILE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
BJ's Restaurant
990 North Center Street
Gaylord, Michigan
April 18, 2006

Chairman Manson called the meeting of the Snowmobile Advisory Committee (SAC) to order at 10:37 a.m., Tuesday, April 18, 2006 in Gaylord, Michigan.

Members Present:

Bill Manson, Chair, Region III, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Grand Rapids
James Duke, Region I, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Munising
Bill Lucas, Region II, Michigan Snowmobile Association, Cadillac
Jack Nelson, Business Community, Greenville
Orville Olson, Representative at Large, Ludington
Lee Murray, Representative At-Large, Hopkins

Ex-Officio Members Present:

Terry L. Johnson, Antrim County Sheriff's Department
Rose Ingram, Huron-Manistee National Forest
Randy Charles, USDA, Ottawa National Forest

Staff Present:

Jim Radabaugh, State Trails Coordinator, Forest, Mineral and Fire Management (FMFM), Lansing
Christie Bayus, Grants Management (GM), Lansing
Steve DeBrabander, State Trails Unit Manager, FMFM, Lansing
Richard Kennedy, FMFM, Lansing
Steve Kubisiak, Recreation and Trails Program Coordinator, FMFM, Lansing
Lt. Jeff Gaither, Law Enforcement Division (LED), Gaylord
Dayle Garlock, FMFM, Gaylord
Ken Davis, Engineer, Office of Land and Facilities
Loretta Cwalinski, FMFM, Gaylord

Mr. Manson welcomed everyone. The Snowmobile Advisory Committee, DNR staff and the audience introduced themselves.

Mr. Manson added Defective Signs under Old Business and Chippewa Sno-cats Bridge Update under New Business.

MINUTES

The minutes of the January 24, 2006 Snowmobile Advisory Committee Meeting were reviewed and corrected.

Motion by Mr. Duke to accept the minutes of the January 24, 2005 meeting as corrected, seconded by Mr. Lucas. Motion for adoption unanimously carried.

Mr. Kubisiak requested in future the Committee provide him with corrections in advance of the meeting so they may be reflected in the minutes.

New Business

Snowmobile Road Crossing Repair Plan -- **Mr. Manson** introduced Ray Roberts and Andy Holmes from Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT).

Mr. Roberts thanked the Committee for the opportunity to address them. He provided a handout and explained their concerns over damage to snowmobile crossings on State Highways. He said their primary concern is for public safety and noted major impacts caused by snowmobile studs include loss of aggregate, trenching, soil erosion and bridge deck damage. He noted there are currently 204 crossings in the Upper Peninsula. Since 2002, 107 official crossings have been constructed or maintained at a cost of over \$488,000. Some of the high volume crossings have 3,000 – 4,000 crossing per season. A new thermoplastic material is used to repair the crossings with a service life of 2 to 5 years. He noted the average annual maintenance cost for the Upper Peninsula alone is \$125,000. He noted these repairs are funded through the region's operation budget.

Mr. Roberts said they are seeking financial support from the Department of Natural Resources to pay for annual crossing maintenance in the amount of \$250,000. He said they will be following up with a letter. He asked for the Committee's support.

Discussion ensued about the gasoline tax and the Recreation Improvement Fund Account. It was the consensus of the Committee that snowmobilers already pay their fair share and should be entitled to a larger share of the gas tax. They do not support use of snowmobile funds to maintain road crossings under the current funding formula.

Mr. Manson encouraged the support of MDOT to revisit the gas tax formula. **Mr. Holmes** said he is willing to take the request back to MDOT for discussion. **Mr. Manson** said there are two different perspectives on this issue, but that they are willing to work with MDOT.

Ralph Oaks requested snowmobile funding to repair a road crossing in Wolverine. **Mr. Manson** responded that counties get a return indirectly from snowmobilers and that normal gas tax should pay for the repairs. **Mr. Oaks** said he was told there are contingency funds available from the Department for road repairs. **Mr. Radabaugh** said there are no snowmobile contingency funds available; however, the Recreational Improvement Fund may be a potential source. It was suggested he speak with Robin Pearson.

Committee Reports

Mr. Olson reported the Finance Sub-Committee met a week ago and is working on a 10-year plan. They have requested budget information from the Department. They hope to have their plan done by the end of the summer. The Sub-Committee members are Mr. Lucas, Mr. Murray and Mr. Olson.

Mr. Murray reported the Law Enforcement Sub-Committee met and is reviewing the Law Enforcement grants program. He reviewed the timeline of Allegan County's grant,

expressed concern with the timing of the grant, and said the process needs to be looked at closer. He read a statement and will fax it to Mr. Radabaugh for follow-up with Grants Management.

Mr. Manson asked Sheriff Johnson if they had any problems, and he responded not in his area. Discussion continued about grant funding and when the funding should be available. **Mr. Murray** mentioned that at least four departments did not get their funding in time.

Old Business

Emergency Response Signs Standard – **Mr. Radabaugh** reported the FMFM Management Team has endorsed the general intent of the emergency sign program. A memo was sent to the Unit Managers providing guidance. **Mr. Manson** requested the information be sent to the grant sponsors.

Defective Signs – **Mr. Manson** asked if there were enough clubs that responded to the Department's request to report defective signs. **Mr. Kennedy** said there were about 15-20 responses and that information has been forwarded on to procurement. Procurement will negotiate with the vender and will advise if a penalty will be imposed.

New business

Trail Grooming Reimbursement – **Mr. Lahti, President of Keweenaw Trails, Inc.** asked for the Committee's support for legislative change to allow groomer operators to be paid through the grants program. He distributed a letter noting the importance of snowmobiling to the local economy, lack of volunteers in his area, the need to pay their groomer operators and that his organization is operating in a deficit.

Mr. Manson noted that labor costs were considered when the workgroup developed the new grooming rates, but that many volunteer hours were unaccounted for and that workman's compensation was not included. The grooming rates are based on a statewide average. **Mr. Manson** requested a breakdown of expenses from Mr. Lahti. Discussion ensued. **Mr. Olson** will send Mr. Lahti some forms to help him track expenses. **Mr. Manson** said the Committee will take this information into consideration, and that it is important to track and document costs.

Workgroup Update – The Workgroup last met on March 24, 2006. **Mr. Manson** discussed the history of the workgroup, charge, make-up, equipment program and grooming rates. He announced, in the future, the grant program will pay 100% of the cost of the grooming equipment. It is estimated the equipment replacement program will cost approximately \$5 million a year. The workgroup is working on the details. Program changes will be included in the grant handbook.

Mr. Radabaugh added that instructions and guidance concerning lease/payments and documentation will also be incorporated in the handbook.

Mr. Radabaugh announced the Department will be moving out of the grooming business and is working with the Committee and Clubs to find groups to take over the grooming. Department grooming will be phased-out over the next two years.

Mr. Manson answered questions from the audience regarding the equipment replacement program.

Partnership Award – Mr. Radabaugh, presented the 2006 partnership award on behalf of Chief Boyd. The Tri-County Snowmobile Club, Lafreniere Construction, Grants Management, Ken Davis, Richard Ahnen, Patrick Olsen and James Sartori were recognized for their contribution in repairing the Menominee River snowmobile bridge.

Chippewa Snow Cats Bridge Update – Mr. Manson distributed pictures of a bridge that was incorrectly installed over the Deer River and asked for a status report. **Mr. Kennedy** reported the abutments were not engineered according to information he received and he is awaiting more information from the field contact. **Mr. Manson** asked what steps clubs need to follow when building bridges.

Mr. Kubisiak said the sponsor should submit construction plans and bid specifications to the Office of Lands and Facilities (OLAF), for review and approval prior to construction. He noted that did not happen in this case and that the problem may have been avoided if the plans were reviewed by the engineers. He reminded Grant Sponsors to work with their FMFM field contacts to make sure that engineering reviews occur. Discussion ensued. Staff will develop a checklist and add it to the handbook for future guidance.

Mr. Kennedy said in terms of the Snow Cat's current situation, they should work with their field contact and send the revised plans to OLAF for review.

STAFF REPORTS

Sheriff Johnson reported Antrim County had no fatalities this year and there were many more families out on the trails.

Recreation Specialist Reports - Reports were submitted and will be attached to the art of the minutes.

Mr. Lucas said Todd Neiss's report should read Jordan Valley Trail Council, and read connector, not spur, from Mancelona to Kalkaska.

Mr. Duke said that he strongly recommends the trail in Melstrand referenced in Dan Moore's report, and asked the Department to reconsider its denial. He said the trail would not serve a single business and provide emergency access. **Mr. Radabaugh** reviewed the trail proposal process and said trail proposal appeals should be directed to Mr. DeBrabander.

Ottawa National Forest -- Mr. Charles reported the public comment period for the Military Hill Bridge project has closed and no public comments were received. **Mr. Manson** asked Mr. Kennedy about funding for the bridge and if he was aware of the issue. **Mr. Kennedy** said a trail proposal is needed and must be reviewed and approved before a grant can be requested for the project. He expressed concern with the old bridge that washed out at the proposed site. **Mr. Charles** said he would follow-up with Rick McVeigh.

M-65 Bridge -- Mr. Kubisiak reported the local sponsor is currently working on a trail proposal with the field contact. The sponsor has met with landowners and they have another meeting with MDOT in the near future.

Snow Country Trails Conservancy -- Mr. Manson asked Mr. Radabaugh about the grant to the Snow Country Trails Conservancy, to purchase permanent snowmobile trails. **Mr. Radabaugh** reported meeting(s) with various Divisions within the Department were held, but there are still many unanswered questions that must be resolved before a grant can be issued. **Mr. Radabaugh** will set-up a meeting with Mr. Manson and Department staff.

Mr. Manson requested a status report on the investigation concerning the notice of failure to perform issued to the Grand Traverse Areas Trails Snow Council last fall. **Mr. Radabaugh** will follow-up with Mr. O'Neill and advise.

PUBLIC APPEARANCE

Tom Gallagher, St. Helen Snowpackers, believes the State should have a program to recycle old trail signs. He expressed concern that trail maintenance sponsors must pay for projects upfront and be reimbursed later. He believes the DNR and MDOT are making it difficult for volunteers to do their job.

Bill Taylor, Lewiston Fun Ones asked questions regarding the timing of insurance payments, the eligibility of fencing as a reimbursable expense under the grants program, and when the grant forms will be fillable on-line. Mr. Taylor is to submit an insurance reimbursement request and provide examples where fence was funded in the past to the Department for review and consideration.

Larry J. Marzean, Alpena Snowmobile Club believes a danger sign is needed to warn of overnight dangers such as broken down groomers abandoned on trails. Discussion ensued. He inquired on the status of a trail proposal. Staff encouraged him to contact his local field contact.

John Hauk, Michigan Snowmobile Council asked if yield signs will be larger next year, and if the Recreation Specialist is available to assist Sponsors. Staff advised the yield signs will be larger next year and Recreation Specialists are available to assist Sponsors.

Greg Olender, Tri-County Snowmobile Club, believes many of the recent program changes are good, but reimbursement rates must be high enough to pay for the total grooming operation. He thanked the Committee and club volunteers for their continued efforts to improve the snowmobile program.

Martin Cottle expressed concern with corporate land sales in the Upper Peninsula and the potential impacts to the snowmobile program. He expressed concern about insurance, noting groomers are not covered for property damage. He reported V&V insurance is requiring all paperwork 14 days before the renewal to be insured.

Mr. Olson asked if a decision has been made concerning advertising on trail maps and posting them at trailheads. **Mr. Radabaugh** said Mr. O'Neill is following-up with Land Management staff, and will advise. **Mr. Olson** would like a reply by the next meeting.

Mr. Lucas asked about the status of the Yuma-Copemish grade. **Mr. Radabaugh** reported there have been several meetings between the Department and MDOT regarding the lease, and he will follow-up on status and advise.

George Zajac, Trailriders, Baldwin asked if the trailhead in Baldwin has been turned over to the Village of Baldwin. **Mr. Radabaugh** said the Department is working on the lease agreement with the Village and that the parking lot will not be paved. **Mr. Zajac** asked if it would be preferable to have a lifelong trail lease instead of five-years. **Mr. Lucas** said he would get with Mr. Zajac on Saturday to discuss that issue.

Don Reed, Vice President, MSA talked about the need for a snowmobile economic study to document its value to the economy. He believes it should be a stand alone study and not include other recreation programs.

Rolland Rieger, P.I. Snow-Trails asked if there is money available for permanent trails. **Mr. Manson** said there was money appropriated, but the definition of permanent trail is not clear. He will be working with the Department to work out the details.

Mr. Manson said he will be meeting with the Governor's Office regarding the Gaylord to Cheboygan Trail.

Mr. Kennedy reminded the sponsors that the equipment status reports are due April 22nd and the sign orders were due March 25th.

NEXT MEETING

The next SAC meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, June 20, 10:30 a.m., BJ's Restaurant & Catering, 990 North Center Street, Gaylord, Michigan.

The meeting adjourned at 3:03 p.m.

Public Present:

Dick Ranney
Roger Kilbury
Al Green, NW MI Snow Council
John Houk, P.I.S.T. & N.E. MI Council
Bradley Potter, Western MI Snow Council
Kaye L. Houk, Presque Isle Snow Trails
Rolland Rieger, P.I. Snow-Trails
Jim Barber, Jordan Valley Trails Council
Bob Eller, Alpena Snowmobile Club
Larry J. Marzean, Alpena Snowmobile Club
Jake Barton, St. Helen Snowpackers
Bob Humpert, Ogemaw Hills Snow Club
Bud Longroy, Ogemaw Hills Snowmobile Club
John & Nancy Griffin, Jordan Valley Trl Cncl
Mark Sellner, Western MI Snow Cncl
Norm Theil, Trail Riders
Sheriff Terry Johnson, MI Sheriff's Assoc

Al Persondek, Rosco-Higgins Trl Cruisers
Bill Taylor, Lewiston Fun Ones
Allen Cottle, Sault Snow Assoc/EUP Snow Cncl
Martin Cottle, Sault Snow Assoc/EUP Snow Cncl
Jim Dingman, Trailriders, Baldwin
George Zajac, Trailriders, Baldwin
William & Mary Caskey, Jordan Valley Trail Cncl
Todd Gauthier, Aide to Rep. Rich Brown
Tom Gallagher, St Helen Snowpackers
Don Mraz, St Helen Snowpackers
Dave Becker, St Helen Snowpackers
Jerry Janeski, Alpena Snowmobile Club
Michael Lahti, Keweenaw Trail Services Inc
Donald Kauppi, Keweenaw Trail Services Inc
Don Reed, MSA VP
Rodney Maltman, PI Sno-Trails
Greg Olender, Tri-County Snowmobile Club